

# **Noble/Seymour/Crippen House**

5622-24 North Newark Avenue  
Chicago, Illinois

PRELIMINARY STAFF SUMMARY OF INFORMATION

Submitted to the  
Commission on Chicago Landmarks  
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NOBLE/SEYMOUR/CRIPPEN HOUSE  
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Date of Construction: 1833-34; 1868; later alterations

In many communities of Chicago, there was a first settler, generally an Easterner whose name is known today. Often, the site of this settler's house is also known. The actual house, however, rarely survives. The Noble/Seymour/Crippen House is one such survivor. As with the Henry B. Clarke House at 1855 South Indiana Avenue (designated a Chicago Landmark in 1970), the Noble/Seymour/Crippen House, specifically its southern portion built by Mark Noble, was built in the 1830s, in the decade of Chicago's incorporation. The Clarke House was probably built in 1837; evidence suggests a 1833 or 1834 construction date for the Noble House. The Clarke House is a larger and more imposing house designed in the Greek Revival style with an elegant columned porch across its front. The Noble House is smaller, simpler, and more typical of its time and place. The house was expanded in 1869 with a two-story addition by Thomas H. Seymour, a key figure in the development of the surrounding community of Norwood Park. As with many other neighborhoods of Chicago, Norwood Park began as a farming community, evolved into a suburban village, and eventually was annexed to Chicago. The Noble/Seymour/Crippen House represents this historic development pattern. Located on a ridge, a high enough point to have afforded the residents of the house a view of the 1871 Chicago Fire some miles away, and surrounded by an expanse of land unusual in the city today, the Noble/Seymour/Crippen House is a visual landmark in its community as well. The history of its construction and change over more than 150 years and the involvement of its two principal owners, Noble and Seymour, in the establishment and growth of Norwood Park make the house a worthy subject for further study and preservation.

Information on houses built in 1830s Chicago is not abundant. Verification of dates of construction and alterations for the Noble/Seymour/Crippen House may be possible through a careful inspection of the building fabric. What is known about Mark Noble and

his house is largely the information provided by A. T. Andreas in his 1884 *History of Cook County Illinois*. Andreas states that Mark Noble came to Chicago in 1831 with his wife and three children, brought here from England by a son who had emigrated to America in 1823. John Noble lived in New York State and traveled to New Orleans and St. Louis before returning to England to bring the rest of his family to the United States. The family arrived in 1831 and spent the winter living in John Kinzie's cabin across the river from Fort Dearborn. In 1832, Mark Noble purchased about four acres of land on the south side of the river east of State Street and north of Madison Street on which stood a shanty in which he and his wife lived for a year. Three of their children made a claim on a piece of land along the North Branch of the river near Belmont Avenue in 1832, after the conclusion of the Black Hawk War which lasted from May to August of that year.

On September 26, 1833, the final treaty between the United States government and the Indians affecting the settlement of Chicago was signed. Later that year, Noble himself moved northward, buying 160 acres of land and claiming an additional 440 acres in what is now Norwood Park and the suburb of Niles. He constructed a one-story frame house into which the whole family moved in early 1834, the children having sold their claim. According to Andreas, the Noble home was "one of the first frame houses built within the township, if not the first." Noble died in 1839, and his son, Mark Noble, Jr., lived in the house until 1843 when he moved to Wisconsin.

The second important owner of the house was Thomas H. Seymour who purchased it in 1868. Seymour had come to Chicago from New York. He worked for the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad before entering the commission business and becoming a member of the Board of Trade, a livelihood he pursued until his retirement in 1902. Seymour and his wife had seven children, and the Noble house was soon too small for the family. The addition he constructed was actually a complete two-story Italianate house with a low hipped roof; the older house was converted to a kitchen and dining room. The older building may also have had some exterior changes: the lintels over the ground-floor windows match those on the addition.

Seymour was a member of the Norwood Park Building and Land Association, formed in 1868 to purchase and subdivide land in the area. Transportation access to the township had improved during the 1850s with the construction of the Milwaukee Avenue Plank Road along an Indian trail leading northwest from Chicago and the building of the Illinois and Wisconsin Railway, soon to be part of the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad. Seymour was one of the first residents of what was planned as the future town of Norwood Park, which took its name from a novel by Henry Ward Beecher. In addition to platting a subdivision, the land association probably had a role in persuading the Chicago and Northwestern to establish a Norwood Park stop and build a station there which the association surrounded with a garden. Traffic was very light, however, and Seymour was one of only two daily passengers for some time. To encourage local development, the land association laid out two parks for the town and constructed the Norwood Park Hotel in 1872, set in a garden complete with a lake. The hotel was not a great success and later became the Norwegian Old Peoples' Home, but the community as a whole did prosper.

The 1871 Chicago Fire spurred the growth of many outlying villages around Chicago, and by 1877, a new and larger train station was needed and built, again landscaped by the land association. Seymour prospered along with his community, serving as a commissioner of the Norwood Park Township established in 1873 and as a village trustee when the land association's subdivision became a village in 1874. He also served as the community's first postmaster from 1870 to 1881. Around his home, then located on sixty-five acres of land, Seymour raised cattle and planted extensive orchards and vineyards. A. T. Andreas described Norwood Park in 1884 as "one of the most pleasant suburbs of Chicago," a condition enhanced by the absence of liquor sales within the village. Both local law and sales contracts of the land association prohibited the establishment of bars or saloons and the sale of small quantities of spirits except by druggists. In the 1890s, Seymour added two porches to his house, one on the old building and one to the front door of his addition. These small identical structures were designed in the Queen Anne style of the period with lathe-turned spindles, jigsawed brackets, and a sunburst motif in the porch gable.

A 1907 promotional brochure titled *Norwood Park: The Ideal Suburb*, depicts the Noble/Seymour House and describes Seymour as the "Father of Norwood Park. . . . Prospective purchasers of Norwood property are invited to call on him. He owns much of the choicest property in Norwood, and will be glad to show visitors the town." Although the brochure refers to Norwood Park as a suburb, the community had been a part of the City of Chicago since 1893. Annexation had allowed city services to extend into the village which encouraged the further redevelopment of farms into building lots. Thomas Seymour died in 1915, and his heirs sold off much of his acreage, retaining a large piece of land to be sold with the house.

Stuart S. Crippen, Sr., purchased the house in 1916. In the later 1930s, the Crippen family left their mark on the house by dividing it to accommodate two Crippen households and provide an office for the family's nearby glue and solder factory. The roof of the Seymour addition was replaced with a higher gable-fronted roof in the Colonial Revival style. The Noble portion of the house was given two dormer windows, and its porch was removed and replaced with a Colonial Revival doorway, topped with a broken pediment containing an urn-shaped finial, perhaps to emphasize the separation between the two residences within the house. The Crippens, as the Seymours before them, employed a very popular suburban style of their time for their additions to Mark Noble's house. They were active members of their community too, holding amateur theatricals and concerts in the house and founding the Norwood Park Baptist Church which initially met on the Crippen property. They took a leadership role in fundraising for community improvements such as Resurrection Hospital and for larger causes such as World War II bond drives, one of which led to the outfitting of a hospital airplane named "The Spirit of Norwood Park."

The Noble/Seymour/Crippen House typifies the history and development of the Norwood Park community, and reflects the growth and change of Chicago over more than 150 years. The original portion of the house, built by Mark Noble, may be the oldest surviving building within the present limits of Chicago; further research is needed to veri-

fy its age, and there may yet be found other buildings of its vintage surviving, as is the Noble house, in altered form. Despite its annexation to Chicago, Norwood Park has maintained its suburban character. Although the community grew more rapidly after 1893, in part because of additional land annexations that began in the 1920s, and continued to see considerable new construction through the 1960s, the Noble/Seymour/Crippen House retained its spacious surroundings. The Crippen family still owns the property, although it is currently being offered for sale. The people associated with the building of the house may not be famous in the history of Chicago, but they were important builders of their community and, like others of their kind, contributed to the growth of the city as a whole.

*OPPOSITE:*

Mark Noble's house of 1833 or 1834 appears today as a wing of the larger Thomas Seymour house, built in 1868, modified in the 1930s by Stuart Crippen who added the gabled roof and dormer windows.

*(Photograph by Rufino Arroyo for the Chicago Historic Resources Survey)*



*OPPOSITE:*

*Norwood Park: The Ideal Suburb*, published in 1907 to promote the community, described a number of residents and depicted their homes, beginning with Thomas Seymour and his house.



*OPPOSITE:*

A gabled roof in the Colonial Revival style was added over the bracketed Italianate roofline of the Seymour house, and dormers were added to the Noble house.

*(Photograph by Rufino Arroyo for the Chicago Historic Resources Survey)*





MR. THOS. H. SEYMOUR.

MR. THOS. H. SEYMOUR is known as the "Father of Norwood Park." He was one of the earliest settlers of Norwood Park, and was foremost in the early development of our suburb. He is at present the largest individual property holder in Norwood, and known for his good judgment in purchasing realty. Mr. Seymour is one of the oldest members of the Board of Trade, having been a member since 1859, but has retired from active participation in the deals of the pit, where he was once a familiar figure. Mr. Seymour is a member of the Improvement Club, and actively promotes improvements for Norwood.

Prospective purchasers of Norwood property are invited to call on him. He owns much of the choicest property in Norwood, and will be glad to show visitors the town.

OPPOSITE:

In the 1890s, identical porches were added to the Seymour house; the one covering the entrance at the far left of the photograph was removed during the Crippen remodeling of the 1930s.

*(Photograph by Rufino Arroyo for the Chicago Historic Resources Survey)*



Residence of Mr. Thos. H. Seymour



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Room 516

320 North Clark Street

Chicago, Illinois 60610

(312) 744-3200